

Family Support Recommendation
Governor's Early Childhood Advisory Council
Budget Request

Recommendation: Statewide Access to Family Support Services through Family Resource Centers

Description: Create a statewide infrastructure with uniform standards of quality for community-based family support services – based on the place-based family resource center (FRC) approach – with equitable access and quality services. The aim is to expand services to underserved areas, stabilize funding for existing FRCs, and improve the breadth and quality of services available to all families.

What is the evidence base to support the recommendation?

Research has shown that children are more likely to thrive when they live in safe, stable, nurturing environments and in families that have the support and opportunities they need to thrive.

- FRCs are a well-established model for delivering primary prevention family support services. FRCs serve as community hubs for family support, promoting child, family and community strengths, building parenting skills, and providing access to community supports, thereby reducing the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. They are universally accessible and support families through their entire life cycle.
- Family support services provided by FRCs include a broad array of activities designed to strengthen families, build key protective factors, and promote healthy development and well-being. FRCs are unique to each community, offering a range of services designed to identify and meet the individual needs of families, including by referral to more intensive or targeted services.
- A core component of FRCs is the delivery of evidence-based and evidence-informed programs and services that have been shown to reduce risk factors for child maltreatment and improve outcomes such as school readiness and child well-being. These services include parenting education and home visiting, some that are universally available and some that are targeted to families experiencing specific risk factors.

What are the benefits/impacts from addressing the issue?

- **Reductions in child maltreatment.** Studies have shown reduced rates of child abuse and neglect investigations in communities that had an FRC compared to similar communities that did not in Allegheny County, PA (Chapin Hall, 2018); and lower rates of substantiated cases and foster care placements over time when a strong network of FRCs was established in San Francisco (Webster, et al, 2019).
- **Return on investment.** A study showed that for every dollar invested in FRCs, the State of Alabama receives a \$4.93 return on investment (Community Service Analysis LLC, 2014).
- **Navigation support for families.** FRCs help families to identify community resources and services that meet their individual needs, and to navigate systems that can be confusing or overwhelming for families.
- **Improved family functioning.** Parents participating in FRC services report increased protective factors including parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, access to concrete support in times of need, and children's social and emotional competence.
- **Wisconsin's Preschool Development Grant:** A stronger system of FRCs throughout the State would support the goal of the Preschool Development Grant to build a comprehensive,

community-based system to support families with young children. This will contribute to the grant's Family Engagement Activities and inform the development of Wisconsin's Statewide Strategic Plan.

What is the Wisconsin specific context in current work?

- Wisconsin lacks funding to support a statewide infrastructure for delivery of high-quality family support services that are accessible and equitable to all families and communities. There is no base funding for FRC infrastructure and no unifying standards or framework to ensure the delivery of quality services.
- While there are approximately 70 FRCs currently operating in Wisconsin, they vary widely in levels of quality, programming, and staffing. They rely on a patchwork of local funding; only eight FRCs receive any funding from the State, which is restricted to the delivery of specific evidence-based or evidence-informed programs and does not support their broader array of services.
- 22 FRCs are members of a network coordinated by Supporting Families Together Association, though SFTA is not currently funded for this important work.

What is the probability/feasibility of the recommendation being implemented?

Many existing components to support the implementation of this recommendation are already in place in Wisconsin.

- **Statewide and National Content Expertise:** A few Wisconsin FRCs have been in operation for close to 30 years and have a wealth of experience to share with others. Through its membership in the National Family Support Network, Wisconsin can leverage other states' knowledge related to expanded and supported FRCs.
- **The Foundation for a Statewide Network:** The current, unfunded statewide network could be expanded upon to create a system with statewide reach and strong supports for quality. The Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Network is functioning well and could be replicated for FRCs.
- **Certified Trainers:** Wisconsin has a cadre of trainers certified to deliver national training curricula, the *Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening and Support* and *Bringing the Protective Factors Framework to Life in Your Work*. These curricula could be provided widely to build capacity of new FRCs and improve the consistency and quality of existing FRCs.
- **Resource and Guidance Materials:** Wisconsin's *Core Competencies for Professionals in the Field of Family Support* and the nationally recognized *Principles of Family Support* can inform effective professional development and practice.
- **Evaluation Structure:** The Wisconsin Prevention Reporting System provides an infrastructure to support data collection and analysis for accountability and quality improvement for individual FRCs and at the statewide level.
- **Collaborative Support:** Cross sector partners, representing Wisconsin's demographics and landscape, were engaged in the development of this recommendation. There is strong support for this recommendation from local, state, and national agencies and partners represented on the Family Support and Prevention Workgroup.

Sources:

Chapin Hall. (2018). Do Family Support Centers Reduce Maltreatment Investigations? Evidence from Allegheny County.

Community Services Analysis LLC. (2014). Social Return on Investment Study

Webster, D. et al (2019). CCWIP reports. University of California at Berkeley California Child Welfare Indicators Project.

